

# A MEDICAL STUDENT'S JOURNEY AT THE JOHN A. BURNS SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

BY KRISTINE L.M. LEE

My journey through medical school was one of discovery and wonder. I am an explorer of the human body, mind and spirit. I knew since the third grade that I wanted to be a physician. The climactic moment came when I needed stitches in my finger, and my father, a local physician, sewed me up. Since that time, I have been on a journey to accomplish this feat. I attended the University of Idaho under scholarship, where I learned all of my basic science and embarked on experimental genetic research. Of course at the time, the research was on zebra, not my sophisticated bi-pedal counterparts. During my senior year, I applied to attend the John A. Burns School of Medicine and was accepted. I remember thinking that my journey was over. I had gotten into medical school and I was set up. I learned in a hurry that I was wrong.

**The first year** of medical school, I carried around Stedman's medical dictionary. You have to learn a new vocabulary and way of communication to understand medical literature, or even what the nurses and doctors are talking to each other about. We also started seeing patients the first week of school. We were like little ducks, following our attending physician around Queen's hospital, trying to walk as fast as he did, and talking to patients who knew way more about medicine than us. The entire time, we relied on the excellent staff and teachers to pull through and help us adjust to our new lives.

**As second year** rolled around, our confidence was being built. We now had a full year under our belts. We also had 50 new friends and comrades all experiencing the dizzy whirl of life as a medical student. The countless hours of studying until 3 in the morning at the old Biomed building. The rush to see who would get that last copy of the latest cardiology book. Typing up our learning issues in the old library and resource center the fastest so that you wouldn't run out of printing paper. Traveling to UC Irvine together to study for our board exams. The fun little games we made up to keep ourselves sane.

**Then the third year** of medical school hit us like a ton of bricks. Suddenly, we're working 100 hours a week directly with patients in the hospital and in clinics. We're responsible for patients' lives now. I remember delivering my first baby and tearing up because someone allowed me to share that most intimate time in their life. I also remember seeing surgery performed for the first time and being awed by the power of medicine. And standing next to you are your future colleagues, learning and absorbing everything with you. Propping each other up in lectures when falling asleep seems to be the only option and making sure that everyone has something to eat. It's in this hectic time that you start truly learning how much impact a doctor has on a patient. Most of the time, it's not just a pill that will cure the patient. It's educating them about their illness, getting to know them and communicating with their family. I

learned to accept that medicine is not perfect, and that each patient is truly an individual that must be approached differently each time. We have had an excellent education and training here at JABSOM. Our teachers and patients have taught us that compassion, empathy, and the spirit of ohana is just as important as knowing how to suture and prescribe blood pressure medications.

**As fourth year** of medical school rolls around, we've started to apply for residency positions. We had an electronic application, and soon enough, we scattered to the wind. We flew to all corners of the United States interviewing with dozens of hospitals to find just the right program. Residency is the training you receive after medical school in your specific field of interest. I will be moving up to San Francisco and working at Kaiser to receive three additional years of training in internal medicine. This program focuses on outpatient, clinical training. I will have my MD, but there is still so much learning to do. I have responsibility for all the patients, making medical decisions and prescribing medicines, but we have a guiding force of physicians who oversee us.

After residency is finished, I intend on moving back to Hawaii and joining my father's practice at Kuakini. It's not just my father's practice, but our small family business. My mother is an LPN and an office manager, and they opened their clinic in the late 70's after dad finished training in internal medicine at the University of Hawaii. Everyday after school was spent in that office, and patients, or my "aunties and uncles" would often comment on my presence and ask me when I was going to let dad have a break and take over. I'm almost positive that none of them had the gift of fortune telling and knew that it would actually happen some 25 years later. I'm going to try and convince him not to retire too early, but stay and share his pearls of wisdom with me. I am honored to receive my parents' legacy and look forward to helping all of our patients, those "aunties and uncles" who encouraged me and have trusted my family to take care of them. I am so grateful that I have had the opportunity to receive my education in Honolulu, and that I will be able to return to Hawaii and take care of our Kama'aina.

